



STATE COURT ADMINISTRATION

Iowa Judicial Branch Building
1111 East Court Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50319

Chad Jensen
Director of Juvenile Court Services

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FIELD GUIDANCE FOR JCS STAFF IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19:

- Given the prolonged stress and difficulty that juveniles and families will experience from this event, Juvenile Court Services staff and service providers are encouraged to have consistent and substantive contact to help mitigate the effects. While we are having to restrict in person meetings to mitigate the risk of transmission, staff are encouraged to increase the frequency of structured phone contact and video conferencing. During these contacts, staff are encouraged to routinely inquire about the juvenile's mental and physical health, emotional well-being, impact of social isolation and any immediate crisis or needs. Staff are encouraged to be creative during this time – take pictures of court orders, case plans, homework assignments worksheets, etc. and send to juveniles via email or text.
- This includes juveniles in the community as well as in foster group care, detention, shelter, supervised apartment living and the Boy's State Training School.
- Prior to scheduling any in person meeting, JCS staff will pre-screen participants for elevated risk of transmitting the coronavirus. Pre-screen by asking the following questions: do you have a temperature greater than 100.4°F; and one or more of the following symptoms – cough, sore throat, muscle aches, headache, or diarrhea. No person who has an elevated risk of transmitting the virus shall personally attend any meetings or proceedings without prior authorization from the Court.
- Staff are encouraged to consult with their supervisor to identify innovative ways to “lay eyes on” a juvenile if the situation warrants direct contact. Any plan to have direct contact with juvenile must follow CDC guidelines for protecting yourself from contracting the virus and comply with guidance contained in the Order signed by Chief Justice Christensen titled “In the Matter of Preparations for Coronavirus/COVID-19 Impact on Juvenile Court Services”, dated 3/13/20. Please share your ideas with your Supervisor who can share with the leadership team

- When deemed necessary by the JCO, one option to “lay eyes on” a juvenile or have direct contact without risking transmission of the disease is to drive to a safe location in the community (home, parking lot, etc.), establish visual contact with the juvenile and communicate using a cell phone. If a client does not have a phone, another option is for staff to remain in the vehicle and speak directly to the juvenile from a safe distance (CDC recommends greater than 6 feet). It is preferred that all contacts be done through a barrier or outdoors while maintaining a safe distance.
- It is recommended that all standard scheduled office visits, regardless of risk level, be postponed until further notice. Intake appointments are encouraged to be done via phone contact or video conferencing if possible.
- No urinalysis testing without Supervisory approval. No breathalyzer tests (signs of impairment should be documented and urinalysis testing can be used to test for alcohol).
- Electronic monitoring will be utilized to enhance supervision of higher risk juveniles.
- In response to COVID-19 and to the extent possible, JCS staff should continue using detention alternatives to avoid placing youth in detention.
- JCOs are encouraged to review youth in congregate care who may be appropriate for early discharge after careful planning and consultation with the youth, care takers, family members, child’s attorney, county attorney and the Court. JCOs must balance what is in youth’s best interest and the best interest of the community. Considerations must also take into account what community based resources are available to help successfully transition the youth back into the community.
- Congregate populations are at a particularly high risk during a public health crisis. JCS staff shall identify youth in detention, shelter, group care, SAL and the Training School who are medically vulnerable and at higher risk to catch COVID-19 in order to more closely monitoring these cases and work with facility staff to ensure the safety and welfare of these youth. Please refer to the CDC website for a list of those at high risk for severe illness from COVID-19. These efforts will continue on an ongoing basis until social distancing requirements are lifted.